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## Reports from the Bee's investigative team

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### Conservation consultant may get \$1 million school district contract

The Rocklin Unified School District may spend \$1 million to hire a company to show it how to save money on energy - a step another district has taken for free.

The 16-school district in Placer County may sign on with Energy Education, which specializes in energy conservation at school sites.

The cost of the contract - \$24,700 a month for four years - does not include the salary of an "energy specialist" and the cost of computer software. The software will cost \$13,950 the first year and \$2,000 each year after that.

The energy specialist is likely to be a teacher earning additional hours for the work, said Larry Stark, assistant superintendent.

The district hopes to reap \$800,000 a year in energy savings with the consultant's help. The contract comes with a money-back guarantee that the program will save money.

Rocklin Unified has to cut \$18 million from its budget over three years. The cuts have meant furloughs, layoffs and the elimination of programs, Stark said.

The consultant's price tag seems steep to some. "It seems like a lot of money to come up with," said Kathy O'Keefe, a district employee and parent. "I've had teachers tell me they can't buy books this year."

Elk Grove Unified recently reported saving \$1 million in an energy conservation program at its 63 schools last year. District staff designed the program with the free help of the Sacramento Municipal Utility District and a committee of staff and parents.

Stark acknowledges that the Rocklin district's energy provider - Pacific Gas & Electric - has a similar program but said the district can realize greater savings with the help of Energy Education.

He said districts that go it alone generally save 7 percent to 10 percent in energy costs. He said that Energy Education can cut energy costs by 20 percent to 30 percent. "They are professionals at doing this," Stark said, noting that the company works with 1,200 districts nationwide.

The contract likely will be on the Aug. 18 board agenda, said Wendy Lang, school board president.



The Sacramento City Unified School District signed a 4.5-year contract with Energy Education in 2009, said Gabe Ross, district spokesman. The district paid \$26,500 a month the first year. Ross said that amount doubled when the district started paying incentives as it began to realize savings. He said the program reduced energy costs by \$1 million the first year.

The San Juan Unified School District recently negotiated a slightly different contract with the company, paying nothing up front but paying it 50 percent of the energy savings on the back end. And unlike most districts, which hire an energy specialist on their own dime, San Juan has two employees paid by Energy Education.

The projections call for \$1.7 million in savings during the first year, said Trent Allen, district spokesman.

- Diana Lambert

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